

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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CHAPTER LXIII. FAITHFUL AND FAITHLESS.

If a malicious fairy had come unbidden to wave her wand and to utter her incantations over the Warren, the result could not have been worse than that which, during the next week, followed the departure of Austin and Mr. Blackston.

Minnie was too angry to express her anger, especially after her mother had shown her the Major's note. Frances went about the house wondering which of the household gods could be proved to have been bought with their own money, for she was in her mother's confidence, and meant to lose as little as possible. Her affairs, not being complicated with a lover, enabled her to bear the news better than Minnie, and, indeed, she had breath enough to express her scorn at the beauty's vexation.

"You should have accepted Harry Laurence, who was fond of you. I don't believe he would have behaved as your Major has done."

"How horrid you are, Frances! I wish Bee were here. She was never cross when one was in misfortune."

"It was lucky for her that she married before all this came out."

"It would have made no difference."

"Perhaps not. I don't know. I hope Austin will exert himself and find something soon."

"How tiresome you are, Frances. I shall go out for a walk. I do think it was very wrong of mother to accept all this

without being sure. Those girls ought to share the property with us now they have taken us in so much."

"You might as well say we should have shared it with them."

"So we ought, and we should never have heard of all this. It's a horrid shame, and very, very hard on me."

Mrs. Gordon did not come down till after lunch-time. She really was ill with anxiety and disappointment. Minnie was too angry with her mother to attempt consolation, and in spite of the cheerless weather every day she put on her things and went out, taking the road along which Harry Laurence had so often come to worship the divinity at the Warren.

Every day she walked with one fixed idea in her mind. Though the Major's letter had been most proper and gentlemanlike, Minnie saw that she might, now she was poor, wait indefinitely for that husband. She had tried to do the best she could for herself, following her mother's teaching; and now it seemed the more she tried the more she failed. Bee had not raised a finger on her own behalf, and she was happy and well off, and here was Minnie going to sink back into the miserable life she so well remembered. No; she would not do that. She, too, would be happy.

Austin was still in London helping the London lawyer to settle the affairs of the Gordons. Minnie was very angry because he wrote so cheerfully, and said that he hoped soon to send his mother some good news.

Good news, indeed! There was none which would have cheered Minnie except on one subject, and that was on the subject of her own life settlement.

Her lover's occasional letters were hateful to her. She read too clearly between the lines.

The news of the change of owners had leaked out very slowly. Dr. Smith had let the cat out of the bag on this very morning, and Harry Laurence had been so startled that he questioned the good old man closely.

He had gone through many stormy phases since Minnie had thrown him over; he had hated her, loved her again, despised her, cursed her, blessed her, and lastly, at hearing this news, he had been filled with deepest sympathy for his worthless love.

Thus it happened that Minnie's expectation was realised on the fifth day. She heard the trotting of a horse and she saw a well-known figure approaching her in the dull wintry afternoon.

Her colour came and went; the discontented pout on her pretty lips disappeared and was replaced by the most pathetic expression it was possible to see on a lovely face. She pretended she wished to pick some holly in order not to see Harry's first look at her. Then he drew in his reins, jumped down from his horse, and begged to help her.

"How do you do, Mr. Laurence? I did not know it was you. Thanks. Please do not trouble yourself or prick your fingers—for me."

He slipped the bridle over his arm and walked slowly by her side, for she had turned her face towards home.

"I have only just heard of your sad misfortune. I should have come sooner to offer my—"

"Please don't offer sympathy. We must accept the fact that we are beggars, and sympathy cannot alter that."

There was a pause. Harry did not know what to say next. As usual, he was not very quick with his ideas.

"How strange it all seems. We hardly know those poor girls by sight even."

"Oh, now they will be all the rage!" said Minnie crossly.

"One cannot forget one's first friends."

"You will see; every one will turn against us now."

"Every one?" Harry was beginning to feel the old influence; this girl had him in her toils at once. He could no more help himself than the traditional fly in the spider's web.

"Well, most persons."

"You must take a house in the neighbourhood. At least, I suppose you will not go away altogether."

"I shall share my mother's poverty. This is not the time to think of oneself," said Minnie softly.

"Let me think for her too, then."

Minnie smiled.

"Now we are poor the friends will be few."

"I think not. I—I—"

Minnie looked up at him, and tears were in her eyes—real tears, for she was very sorry for herself.

Then Harry forgot that she was engaged to some one else, and forgot that she had cruelly repulsed him; forgot everything but the tears in those blue eyes—eyes which were as heaven to him.

"Don't say that. You know anything you tell me—"

"Oh, hush, you forget."

"What?"

"That I am—"

"Engaged. I don't care. You don't really care for him, Minnie, or you wouldn't be crying. If you really want me—I—I—well, you know, Minnie, that I'm yours."

He tried to take her hand, and Minnie's resistance was of the weakest. The afternoon was no longer dreary; and, after all, she could now appreciate true love. It came at such a convenient moment.

One more appealing look and the deed was done, in such a moment of time that neither could have said which of them made the first movement towards the other. Harry forgot the past and the present, and, what seemed more incredible, forgave the past and the present! He had got her, he had won her, and the poor fellow would not pause to think what it was he had won, and what a future he was preparing for himself.

When they reached the Warren gates, Minnie stopped.

"Oh, Harry, don't come in; mother and Frances won't understand; besides, Austin, if he knew, would say something disagreeable. We can keep it to ourselves."

Harry was only too glad to agree; he could easily promise to keep that sort of secret.

When Minnie re-entered the house, her face was bright and smiling; she could afford to be cheerful, and, not knowing the secret, Mrs. Gordon wondered at her altered expression. As for herself, she had quite given way to despondency, and remained half the day in her boudoir sitting over the fire, her spirit crushed. She felt that life was no longer worth living, and that if the loss of the money was terrible, the loss of Austin's good opinion was far worse. She had always wished to

stand well and had stood well in her children's opinion, and now her best and noblest despised her. She spent long hours mentally writhing under this feeling. The whipcords which she had herself knotted were very sharp and cutting, and she felt their sting. She had never turned towards Heaven in the days of prosperity, so now that comfort did not seem possible; she had always believed first in herself, and now she had failed life seemed not worth having.

Austin was still in London, and she knew by intuition that he was seeing "those girls" often. The spirit of a strong woman was broken; she who had been merciless called out for some one to pity her, for, better than any one else, she knew how selfish Minnie was and how narrow and sordid Frances had become. It was all the fruit of her training, and the worst of it was that she knew it. There needs no special avenger to dispense punishment, our deeds are self-acting.

Very occasionally Mr. Blackston came up on necessary business. He came with smooth words on his lips. There was no hurry about moving. Of course, the Miss Gordons were well cared for by Miss Evans. It was really doubtful if they would return to the Warren. They ought to see more society. They were quite unused to the world. Would Mrs. Gordon settle somewhere near? She knew so many county people now; the loss of money would make no difference.

It was only then that Mrs. Gordon, usually so polite, so self-contained, turned upon Mr. Blackston with quiet irony.

"If you think that, Mr. Blackston, it shows you do not know society."

Mr. Blackston did not like the retort, but laughed it off.

"Well, well, really money is a mere accident. In these radical days—that is, in these days of common sense and—and high thinking, low living is fashionable."

Mrs. Gordon could not bear more than a small amount of small talk, and brought the lawyer back to his business.

"You were saying that the certificate having been proved, there is no need of the law?"

"None whatever. Old Mr. Gordon, never thinking his son was married, made no provision for such an event, otherwise he would have specified that these girls were not to inherit."

"Very well; then we shall go as soon as possible. I shall go abroad for a little while, whilst my son settles into his

school; then we shall take a house near to him. You can tell Miss Gordon she can come here this day month."

"Very generous, very thoughtful; but Miss Gordon is anxious that you should not go before the spring."

"Her wishes have no weight with me," said the widow; and thus she silenced the lawyer.

The packing continued, chiefly done by Frances, whilst Minnie helped her by fits and starts when not engaged in going to meet Harry Laurence.

At last the day of departure drew near, and Austin was coming home to escort his mother to the South of France. He had been too much occupied to come sooner, and she did not seem to want him. The last evening was not altogether as cheerless as might have been expected, for Harry boldly came to spend the evening, and, in spite of Minnie's protest, told Mrs. Gordon that Minnie had that day written to Major Bond, and that he was bent upon taking his place. She appeared surprised, tried to look shocked, then finally cried a little, and Harry's attempt at comfort was most comical—to Frances, who was the looker-on.

"Well, on your last evening, I must forgive you, you wilful children. Dear Harry, Minnie is a beggar. You had better have waited to marry Miss Gordon. I will leave you alone, and Frances will not disturb you."

She went up to her boudoir, and sat down by the fire, sinking into one of her depressed moods. She looked years older. She had paid very heavily for her passing glory.

She did not hear a carriage drive up, nor did she know what was coming when she heard a knock at the door.

"Come in," she said listlessly, and then she knew at once that it was Austin's knock.

He came towards her very quietly, and the look on her face made him pause. She had sinned deeply; she had deceived, and she had caused the innocent to suffer; but none of the suffering she had inflicted could be compared to that which she was enduring. Austin saw and recognised the meaning of the look, and a great wave of pity and remorse swept over him. He had judged her and condemned her. Some day, might he not want pity? Could he be sure that he, too, might never sin as deeply, and would seek in vain for the pity of his fellow-creatures?

"Mother," he said, and he knelt on one knee before her, "mother, I have come."

She held out her hand to him; all the elasticity of her once brave spirit seemed gone; the sight of the son who had condemned her was no comfort to her.

"Mother, I will take you away to-morrow, and in the sunny South you will forget all this."

She shook her head.

"I can do nothing more; Austin, some day you will get on, and when I am out of the way——"

"Hush, mother; don't talk like that. I shall not leave you till you are better. You will enjoy new sights and new lands. You will get back your—your strength."

Mrs. Gordon was silent.

Austin put his arms round her. There was such a feeling of protection and strength about the action that Mrs. Gordon gave a gentle sigh; some of the despair flew away on the wings of that sigh.

For a few moments they remained thus, and then she spoke:

"You have always been a good son to me, Austin. Don't let me be a drag upon you now."

"A drag upon me! You are my first duty—my first. Mother, there is some one else who thinks so."

A faint flush overspread Mrs. Gordon's face. She understood only too easily.

"Wait till I am dead. It won't be long."

"No, no. Mother, I want you to care about her for my sake. I want you to believe in her goodness. You need never fear her. If you knew——" He rose and looked down upon his mother's head; her hair seemed to have turned greyer, the soft lace hardly contrasted with her hair now.

"I shall soon be away."

"Yes, and for that reason, mother, I want you to see her—to please me."

He walked quickly to the door and called softly. At the end of the passage Grace and Nan stood together.

"Come," he said, and Grace came. Her face was pale, and she was much afraid; but Austin wished it, so she obeyed.

In another moment the two stood by the side of the broken-down woman. Mrs. Gordon quickly glanced at the girl, and the glance took her all in—her improved beauty, her youth, her brightness, her joy. She felt a sudden pang of jealousy. This girl had conquered, and she had taken all from her, even her son. She would not hold out her hand. Grace had also looked, and the glance had shocked her. Was

this the woman she had come so near to hating, this sad, miserable, broken-down woman? Had she indeed disliked her, rebelled against her wishes? It was as if the sun envied the gas-lamp.

Grace, too, was melted. It was easy to forgive. She did not wait for encouragement or for the first word, but she knelt down and took the cold hands in hers.

"Forgive me, forgive me," she said, and she meant it now. "I have done you wrong! For Austin's sake, let me be a real relation—let me be another daughter! I will do all you tell me, if only you will let me make everything easier. I must, I will! I owe it all to you. I owe all my happiness to him and—to his mother."

The cold hands relaxed; the widow had never expected to hear such words from James Gordon's daughter. It seemed so strange, so unlike the ideas she had of the world and its ways. This strange new love, so freely given, spoke of a forgiveness somewhere even for her, and somewhere there was still love and happiness. She bent her head and kissed Grace Gordon.

"He is good, my boy Austin, and you are worthy of him, Grace!"

CHAPTER LXIV. LOVE ON EARTH.

SIBYL was never absent from the service in the Rev. Nathaniel Phillips's church on the days she took the class of rough girls. The clergyman, after being struck with the strange likeness of his lost Minnie, went from a state of depression to one of happiness. He had called on Miss Evans, and had managed to win her consent to letting Sibyl work in the parish. The girl was only too glad. She had sunk so low in her own estimation that she had become morbid. Work was the best cure, Nan thought, but the cure did not come quickly. Even when the Rev. Nathaniel Phillips became a constant visitor, and showed her very openly how much he admired her, Sibyl could not be won over to take any interest in herself. She admired the young man's goodness and zeal, which were both evident; but she felt that if he knew, oh, if he knew the dreadful past, he never could admire her.

Poor Mr. Philips found his second love as unapproachable as his first; but he exalted the second one into a superior being—a woman so lovely, so pure, so angelic that she was quite unequal to noticing his love, admiration, and reverence.

Nan saw the state of things, but Grace was quite ignorant of the fact. She only saw her sister's sadness, and tried to be doubly cheerful, which cheerfulness was not difficult after Austin had come to tell the news.

The effect on Sibyl was not so good. The poor girl argued out that the fact of her having a good name to keep made her past conduct appear worse. She had fallen from her own pedestal, and she could not bear the sight.

It was some time before Mr. Phillips heard the news. The first he heard of it was the fact of Miss Evans asking him to dinner, and casually mentioning that her charges had retaken the name of Gordon.

"Gordon!" gasped the poor man. "Are you related to a Mrs. Gordon who once lived at Longham?"

"Distant cousins," said Grace, blushing.

"That accounts for the likeness. I have often wondered over it. You, Miss Sibyl, are extremely like one of the Miss Gordons."

"We have never seen them," said Sibyl, looking down. If Mrs. Gordon knew the story, as she would know, perhaps, through her son, she would think her still more unfit to associate with her daughters!

The poor man could not make out whether Miss Sibyl cared about him or not. He fancied she did not, and he felt as if he dared not ask her, and he dared ask Miss Evans even less.

That evening he made a desperate plunge, as shy men often do. Sibyl happened to be showing him some photographs in the quiet, subdued manner now habitual to her.

Mr. Phillips only saw her taper fingers as she turned the leaves, he heard not a word of her explanation or remarks. Suddenly looking up, he saw they were alone, for Miss Evans and Grace had gone away.

He made a desperate resolution. He would ask her now, before she could have time to say much more than yes or no. He had loved before, but now he fancied he had never loved at all.

"Miss Gordon, I—I am going to make you angry. I am a presumptuous fool, I know; but I—I have but one excuse. I love you. You—you——"

Sibyl started up and left his side. She went towards the fire and stood on the hearthrug, her two hands on the chimney-piece, and her face half averted.

Mr. Phillips felt all his hopes were over.

"Mr. Phillips, please don't say such a thing. You do not know me. I am not what you take me for."

"Not—you mean the change of name. It has to do with property."

"Yes and no. We fancied we were disinherited—that we had no right to our home and father's money; but now that is changed we are going home to the Warren."

Mr. Phillips could hardly believe his ears.

"And Mrs. Gordon?"

"It was a mistake, not her fault, of course. It was her doing that we left home and lived in Germany. I suppose she meant to be kind—at least not unkind—I don't know; anyhow, we went to Germany, and there——"

"Yes, I see, I understand," murmured Mr. Phillips, really hardly understanding at all.

"No, no, you cannot. There I——"

Sibyl blushed to the roots of her hair. She felt she must confess—that this was her punishment. How could such a good man ever wish to marry her if he knew?

"Well, you have come back. I did not know, of course, that you were rich."

"Not that. How could you think I should mean that? Worse; it is about myself."

"Then don't let me know it; it cannot be bad."

"You must hear it. You are so good, so very, very good; and in your sermons you make me feel how bad I am."

"I don't mean to do that, I'm sure."

"But you do. I was so horrid—so very wicked in Germany. My sister is really good. She is a saint, but I am quite, quite the opposite."

"Oh, no; that is impossible."

"It is not," said Sibyl impatiently. "I am bad. I fell in love with a Baron, and I nearly——"

"Nearly married him, but not quite."

"No, I nearly ran away with him. I felt so mad, I did not seem to care; and—oh, Mr. Phillips, if it had not been for Grace, I should be with him now—and—he had a wife."

"The scoundrel," said Mr. Phillips, without once thinking of the sin of the fair penitent.

"He was a bad man, but I did not mind that then. I would have done anything to have got rid of that life of drudgery, and now I would give anything to forget that dreadful time—but I cannot.

It haunts me. There, now you know it all."

"You were young, and that wretch deserved the gallows; but you are here, not there now, and that is past. Won't you forget it? Sibyl—Sibyl—"

"How can I be a clergyman's wife?"

"You—you are much too good for me, that is all I know; and if you will let me keep you safe, then, all your life, all my life, you shall never repent it."

"Then you don't think me very, very wicked?"

Sibyl held up her head, and found that the man she knew to be so good, so devoted, was kissing her hands.

"Don't, don't, please."

"Why not? Give me leave."

Sibyl lifted her face, and the Rev. Nathaniel Phillips stooped a little, and then—

Then Nan's step was heard, and the door opened. She smiled. She was happy, very happy, for here was a man who could keep Sibyl safe.

"Nan, he says I'm not too wicked for—"

"Too good for me, Miss Evans. If you only knew how happy she has made me!"

"My little Sibyl," said Nan, kissing her, "you must look happy now—and forget."

"Not forget, but, oh, so glad to be forgiven."

June has gone by on wings of noiseless swiftness, and Time has brought changes at the Warren.

It is summer weather over the glorious moor; no wind howls in the firs, only a soft sighing of the sea is heard among the branches, whilst squirrels scamper up and down and twirl their long bushy tails in glee. They are happy and free.

There is a large family gathering at the beautiful Warren. The Austin Gordons are keeping open house, and have managed to stow away Sibyl and her husband and their one girl, Bee and her Colin with a following of five. The Laurences came over to dine, and are going to start home again. Minnie is a great invalid, and she has no children. Her married life has been more clouds than sunshine, and poor Harry has much to bear. Austin is the life of the party, and is talking of old times with Sibyl. Actually Gretchen and her mother are coming to stay at the Warren.

Suddenly there is a hush in the hall as a figure dressed in black glides down.

It is Mrs. Gordon. She comes and talks to one and the other, but there is a strange vagueness in her speech, and a painful incoherency in some of her words. Mrs. Gordon's intellect has failed. She hurts no one, often talks sensibly, then relapses into old times. Sometimes these scenes are painful. She speaks of a time when she must hide everything, and when she must get rid of "those girls."

Suddenly, and very quietly, Grace goes forward and gently takes her mother-in-law's arm.

"Come with me, dear mother; you will catch cold at the open door. Minnie has gone."

This one voice and this one touch she always obeys. It is so loving, so gentle; she listens to it even when Austin can do nothing with her.

"Very well, my dear, as you like. Minnie is so ungrateful, you know. If poor Frances were here! She is happier dead. I wish I were dead, don't you?"

"No, no. Come and wish Nan good night."

"If you think I had better. You know best, my dear. Your children are safe, they will never insult you; but don't let them open secret drawers, Grace; you understand."

Grace leads her into the boudoir, where Nan is resting after the long evening, and with her help Mrs. Gordon is led to her room, where her maid is waiting for her.

"Good night, Grace. Kiss me, dear."

"Nan, Nan," cries Grace when they are alone, "I think she is happy. As far as she knows, I think she is."

"My own Grace, you have made her so, but it is a hard trial."

"No, no. Austin's mother is mine. But tell me what you think of Sibyl?"

"My dear, I never could have believed it. She has become quite a clergyman's wife; but her husband spoils her."

"We both want spoiling. Remember, you accustomed us to it when we were young."

"Well, I really think you have plenty of it now. Austin rules his boys with a rod of iron, and his wife and children he ruins with indulgence."

Austin's boys are those of his very flourishing school, for the Warren has been added to enormously, and Mr. Gordon's school is famous. How Grace gets through all her work puzzles even Nan, who is the other prop of the house.

"Mr. Jones is coming, Nan, on purpose to

meet Gretchen. Austin believes he means to marry her. He never would marry any one in England."

"Now you must talk no more. Heaven bless you, child. But Grace, who could have believed in all this?"

"It is all your doing—all of it."

"Humph! What nonsense. Go to bed."

NAPOLEON AND THE STAGE.

It is difficult to understand, taking into consideration the innumerable published records concerning the First Napoleon, that even in those more exclusively relating to his everyday life, so little mention should have been made of his well-known predilection for the theatre. This is the more surprising, inasmuch as from his early youth when, an obscure lieutenant of artillery, he was indebted to Talma for his rare visits to the *Comédie Française*, down to his last appearance at that theatre during the "Hundred Days," his interest in the prosperity of the national drama never flagged, but retained its influence in the midst of his most ambitious projects, uninterrupted from the commencement to the close of his eventful career.

In the absence of any complete work on the subject, it may not be uninteresting, with the aid of contemporary and other authentic documents, to give some idea of Bonaparte's partiality for dramatic representations, especially for those of the *Comédie Française*; and to record, stage by stage, the progress of his scheme for a thorough reorganisation of the leading Parisian theatre. Shortly after his nomination to the post of First Consul, we find him in 1800 at Malmaison, engaged in superintending the erection of a miniature "salle de spectacle," calculated to accommodate two hundred spectators; the performers being exclusively amateurs, including the future Queen of Holland, Hortense Beauharnais (the "star" of the company), her brother Eugène, Junot and his wife, General Lauriston, and Bourrienne. The latter sums up as follows the merits of the "troupe": "Hortense acted delightfully, Eugène very fairly, Lauriston was rather heavy, and without vanity I may say that I was not the worst. At all events," he adds, "if we were not good, it was not for want of practical advice, for Talma and Michot were always present at our rehearsals, and spared neither encourage-

ment nor criticism." Bonaparte never acted himself, but took great pleasure in witnessing the performances.

One of the last pieces represented by the amateur company, selected by the First Consul himself, was the "*Barbier de Séville*," in which Hortense Beauharnais obtained a brilliant triumph as Rosine, Lauriston personating Almaviva, and Bourrienne Bartholo. It was played several times, and we learn from a letter of Bonaparte addressed to Joséphine (who was then at Plombières), and dated July the first, 1802, that on the preceding evening, "Hortense acted Rosine with her usual intelligence and ability."

In the same year an annual subsidy of one hundred thousand francs was granted by the First Consul to the *Théâtre Français*, the superintendence of which establishment was entrusted to the prefect of the palace, Monsieur de Rémusat. From this period the comedians were absolutely under the control of the chief of the state, who, by a decree dated January the sixth, 1802, despatched Talma, Mademoiselle Raucourt, and other members of the company to Lyons, in order to give the inhabitants of that city a taste of their quality. Bonaparte rarely missed a first performance, either at the *Opéra* or at the *Théâtre Français*, accompanied always by Joséphine, who desired nothing better than an opportunity of displaying a new dress or a recently purchased set of jewels. Meanwhile, the *Comédie Française* had lost two of its most illustrious members, Molé dying in 1802, and Mademoiselle Clairon, long since retired from the stage, in 1803. The future rivals, Mademoiselle Duchesnois and Mademoiselle Georges, had made their first appearance; and Talma, divorced from one wife, had married another in the person of Madame Petit, daughter of the actor Vanhove.

In 1803, by order of the First Consul, then installed at St. Cloud, a theatre was erected adjoining the palace, and thither the actors of the *Théâtre Français* were frequently summoned for the entertainment of the guests; Racine's "*Esther*" being selected for the opening performance. These representations were interrupted during the months of June and July by the departure of Bonaparte for Ghent and Brussels, accompanied, or rather preceded, by Talma, Mademoiselle Raucourt, and other artists of the *Comédie Française*, as well as by a few musicians belonging to the orchestra of the *Opéra*. In the course

of this triumphal excursion festivities of all kinds rapidly succeeded one another; in both cities the reception of the illustrious visitors was enthusiastic, and the appearance of Joséphine at the Brussels theatre excited so prolonged an ovation that Talma, the "Cinna" of the evening, was unable for several minutes to proceed with his part. Early in August the First Consul returned to St. Cloud, and two months later "Andromaque" was performed there by his express command, he himself arranging the cast of the piece, which included Talma, Lafon, and the two new recruits, Mademoiselles Duchesnois and Georges, the latter of whom, as is well known, had attracted the special notice of the chief of the state by her incomparable beauty.

In 1804, Bonaparte's appearances at the theatre were few and far between. This abstention was probably due to two causes; first, to a doubt as to his reception by the audience owing to the recent execution of the Duc d'Enghien, which had excited a painful sensation throughout France; and secondly, to the manifold occupations entailed on him by the approaching proclamation of the Empire. A single visit to the Opéra in the early part of the year is recorded by Madame de Rémusat, who accompanied Joséphine on the occasion, and who states in her Memoirs that the First Consul, on entering his box, "advanced to the front as if he were charging a battery, and, either because the spectators had not forgotten their habit of applauding him, or on account of precautions taken by the police, was received with a fair show of enthusiasm." Nevertheless, although disinclined to brave the public gaze, Bonaparte was far from neglecting the concerns of his favourite theatre; and in the contest for supremacy between Duchesnois and Georges, which had been taken up by the press with great acrimony on both sides, openly avowed his partisanship for Mademoiselle Georges; whereas Joséphine, jealous of the impression produced on her husband by the beautiful actress, as strenuously supported her talented but plain-featured rival. So that, in his anxiety to please all parties, Monsieur de Rémusat, superintendent of the theatres, had a hard time of it. Eventually both were admitted members of the society, and peace once more reigned in the "house of Molière."

On May the eighteenth, 1804, the Empire was proclaimed, and a fortnight later the

actors of the Théâtre Français, summoned to take the oath of allegiance to their sovereign, were entitled "comedians in ordinary of the Emperor." In the following year, during the absence of Napoleon in Italy, the first performance of "Les Templiers," by Raynouard, created an extraordinary sensation; this piece, one of the most important novelties of the period, was played thirty-five times consecutively, and on the Emperor's return was represented before him at St. Cloud. It has been stated that, in the course of an interview with the author, Napoleon suggested some alterations in "Les Templiers." Raynouard not only declined to make these, but also refused certain offers of advancement made to him. "He prefers his independence," the Emperor is reported to have said to Fontanes, "which means opposition to my will. Very well, let him do as he likes, but he must be 'surveillé.'"

In October, 1805, war having been declared against Austria, Napoleon left Paris at the head of his army, and on his arrival at Strasbourg a characteristic trait is recorded of him; namely, the despatch of an order that a "gratification" should be paid to Fleury, whose acting in "Le menteur" had amused him. Two months later the battle of Austerlitz had been won, and popular excitement was at its height; bulletins from the seat of war were read aloud amid acclamations in every theatre, and hastily improvised couplets in praise of the army and its chief were sung by the actors. Shortly after the return of the conqueror, he visited the Opéra and the Comédie Française in state, and on both occasions, says an eye-witness, "was received with an enthusiasm bordering on frenzy."

Talma had always been Napoleon's favourite actor, and the few details handed down to us of their conversations at St. Cloud and elsewhere are extremely curious and interesting. Nothing pleased the Emperor more than an opportunity of airing his opinions on dramatic art, a subject of which he was never weary; and while discussing the relative merits of Corneille and Racine, or criticising the recent productions at the Théâtre Français and their interpreters, he displayed an acuteness of perception which astonished the professional listener. "You gesticulate too much," he said one day to the tragedian, referring to the latter's performance of Cæsar in "La Mort de Pompée"; "such is not the habit of Emperors or Kings."

You come here frequently, and find me surrounded by a crowd of petitioners, Princes who have lost their thrones, and generals ambitious of occupying one; all actors in their way, myself included. Do you see us lift our arms above our heads? Do you hear us force our voices beyond the usual pitch? No, we speak naturally, without exaggeration either of tone or gesture; but our tragedy—and we have plenty of it—is none the less effective for being real!" On another occasion, the actor happening to remark that the subsidy granted by Government to the Opéra was considerably larger than that enjoyed by the Comédie Française: "Very possibly," replied the Emperor, "but you forget, Talma, that the Opéra is the luxury of the nation, whereas your theatre is its glory."

The year 1806 was marked by an arbitrary act on the part of Napoleon, which was deeply resented by Paris playgoers. The number of theatres in the capital had for some time been steadily increasing, amounting altogether to twenty-five; of these only ten were allowed to remain open, the other fifteen being suppressed by an Imperial decree. This rigorous measure, adopted in consequence of the Emperor's idea that the multiplicity of minor theatres seriously affected the receipts of the more important establishments, does not appear to have benefited the latter; for in a passage of Madame de Rémusat's *Memoirs* she expressly states that "the Opéra is heavily in debt, the Opéra Comique attracts no one, and the Théâtre Français is on its last legs. Meanwhile, the Parisians care for nothing but the 'Pied de Mouton' and the ballets of the Porte St. Martin."

In 1807, the tragic repertory of the Comédie Française had been deprived of one of its principal interpreters by the sudden departure of Mademoiselle Georges, who, in order to escape from her creditors, had secretly left Paris, and betaken herself to St. Petersburg, where a brilliant engagement had been offered her. This "escapade" occurring shortly before the Imperial "progress" to Erfurt, a substitute for the fugitive was indispensable, and Mademoiselle Bourgois, a promising young actress, was chosen to fill her place.

According to Madame Talma, who accompanied her husband to Erfurt, a large barn having been transformed into a temporary theatre, two arm-chairs were reserved for the Emperor Alexander and Napoleon, the rest of the spectators, Kings, Princes, and other notabilities, including

"Monsieur de Goethe, conseiller intime," occupying the remaining seats. Sixteen performances were given at Erfurt, besides one of "La Mort de César" at Weimar; the latter tragedy having been selected by Napoleon himself in spite of Talma's objections, almost every line containing some allusion which could hardly fail to embarrass both audience and actors. The Emperor, however, was deaf to all remonstrances, and the piece was played; it amused him to compare his own position with that of Caesar surrounded by conspirators, "all ready," he said, "to fall on me whenever they have a chance!"

In the brief intervals between Napoleon's campaigns, the leading actors of the Comédie Française were in constant attendance on him either at Fontainebleau, Trianon, or the Tuilleries; consequently the receipts of their own theatre, mainly supported by performers of inferior merit, were hardly sufficient to defray the current expenses. Abuses of all kinds, moreover, had gradually become, if not positively authorised, at least tolerated; and while the few Parisians who still frequented the Théâtre Français were condemned to listen to worn-out stock pieces played by indifferently trained recruits, the "chefs d'emploi," whenever they were free to follow their own devices, reaped a rich harvest by giving performances on their private account at Lyons, Bordeaux, and other provincial towns. This unsatisfactory state of things was not remedied until 1812, when the famous decree of Moscow, dictated in three successive evenings by Napoleon during his occupation of the Kremlin, reorganised the Théâtre Français on an entirely new basis, the principal articles of which, with some necessary modifications, are still in force at the present day.

In June, 1813, profiting by a temporary cessation of hostilities, the Emperor, accompanied as usual by a large contingent from the Théâtre Français, arrived at Dresden; this time comedy was in the ascendant, its chief interpreters being Fleury and Mademoiselle Mars. Scarcely, however, had the opening performance been given, when the unexpected return of Mademoiselle Georges from Russia, after an absence of five years, rendered a change in the programme necessary. Talma was hastily summoned from Bordeaux, and St. Prix and other actors from Paris; and the fair delinquent having been received with open arms, Corneille and

Racine henceforth occupied the "affiche" alternately with Molière and Marivaux.

A pleasing anecdote, relating to Mademoiselle Mars, may appropriately be recorded here. During her stay in Dresden, while driving in an open carriage with Mademoiselle Bourgoïn, the horses suddenly took fright, and both ladies were thrown out. Mademoiselle Bourgoïn escaped unhurt, but Mademoiselle Mars was slightly bruised on the forehead, and by a natural instinct of coquetry, in order to hide the disfigurement, wore a veil for some days after the accident. Happening to meet the Emperor on the promenade, he gallantly condoled with her on her "little misfortune." "But," he added, gently lifting the veil as he spoke, "that is no reason for depriving me of the pleasure of admiring your charming face." Such a compliment, from one who rarely paid any, was an event in the actress's life, and Mademoiselle Mars never forgot it.

Once, and once only, during the "Hundred Days," on April the twenty-first, 1815, Napoleon was present at the Comédie Française, having expressed a desire to see Talma and Mademoiselle Duchesnois in the tragedy of "Hector." He was received by the fickle Parisians with the same enthusiasm they had recently lavished on the Emperor Alexander and the King of Prussia, and, on retiring after the conclusion of the piece, sent a complimentary message to the two eminent artists in acknowledgement of the talent displayed by them. He never entered a theatre again.

NIGHT AND DAY IN JAMAICAN MOUNTAINS.

THE last mosquito is gone. Up here in the mountains we never see the lively dipteran after dusk; night, on the contrary, is, on the plains, the time for its painful operations. The great black swifts that every evening sweep over the house with a rushing sound of wings have all passed into the darkening east. It is a still and balmy evening—one of a long series in this tropical summer—bearable, even pleasant, three thousand feet above the sea. Almost the only sounds to break the quiet are the low coo—a note of sweet content—of a wild pigeon in the forest, and the softened bark of a dog at one of the white-walled cottages on the distant hills. The eye from this lofty vantage-point takes in many a

square mile of varied landscape, with a background of sea, growing faint under the gathering mists; and the whole land lies peaceful, resting from the exhausting effects of the August day. So still is the air that the smoke from a negro's provision field in a valley below rises in a thin blue stream perpendicularly from the earth.

We are far removed from the haunts of men, from towns and centres of trade, the nearest settlement is miles away, and on all sides the primeval forest encircles us. The calm of Nature seems to enter into body and spirit. It is the hour of reveries—a time for peace with oneself and with all men.

In the east the lofty mass of the Blue Mountains, a little while before golden in the setting sun, has purpled and changed to a dull grey; about its Peak a crest of snowy cloud has gathered. "It has put on its night-cap," we used to say. The mist, too, is collecting in the valleys near us, and a great owl, flying down between a break in the forest, shows quite white, though tawny in plumage, against the dark wall of trees. The honeysuckle, white and yellow-flowered, growing upon the fence of the barbecue, throws out a sweet perfume; and a hawk-moth, three inches in length, is plunging his head into the flowers. Clad in a suit of Lincoln green, with two bands of crimson across his back, he is a gorgeous insect, and forms quite a contrast with another that can only boast, though of larger bulk, a garment of dingy brown and black; while a third species at the honeysuckle is arrayed in a coat of sober grey flecked with black spots. Among these greater folk, slither and more agile moths skip from flower to flower, touching each barely for an instant. Countless minute insects—beetles and flies—crawl and creep within the sweet-scented petals, some lingering there till the morning to form a breakfast for the humming-birds. In the air above, a goat-sucker darts up and down, following its curious zigzag course, at times uttering the cry—it has no pretensions to a song—which has earned for it the sobriquet of the "Gi-me-a-bit." It is plying its trade of insect-hunter, and from its busy manner appears to be well rewarded with the spoils of the chase. Once or twice, bringing its pointed wings together across its back, it has swooped down some thirty feet or more through the air, making a noise as if one had blown into the mouth of an empty flask.

Columbus, when asked to describe

Jamaica, crumpled up a sheet of note-paper and, half smoothing out the folds, laid it on the table as the best illustration he could give of the mountainous nature of the island. We cannot improve upon this as a description of the present scene, beautiful as it is. Behind and to the right the rising hills, vertebræ of the rocky backbone of the island, are clothed to their highest ridges with the swelling folds of the dark green forest, which serves to soften the jagged outline of the honeycombed limestone.

In the valleys the forest has long since been cleared, its place being taken by the groves of orange and pimento-trees, the grey stems of which now bend under the weight of the fragrant spice berries. In front and to the left, the land, rising and falling in row after row of thickly wooded hills, slopes away gradually to the distance of a mile, and then shoots down two thousand feet. To the north, hills rise again in tier upon tier, marked in many places by white-walled houses; and the view spreads outward and onward, over estate, pasture, village, and forest to the distant sea. If the weather is propitious, one may see in this direction, across the grey Caribbean Sea, a blue line in the sky marking the position of the lofty mountains of Cuba.

In front, however, the land, after its precipitous descent, spreads out in a spacious plain, at once the most interesting and curious feature of the whole outlook—interesting and curious, since to north and south, to east and west, the plain is completely shut in by lofty hills and mountains, and both together, hill and plain, seem like the crater of some extinct volcano, or the basin of a great lake. Words convey a slight idea of configuration; they cannot paint the wonderful colour of the surrounding heights or of the surface of the land-locked vale with its numerous white-walled houses, its verdant cane-fields and groves of dark umbrageous mango. Like the basin of a great lake we said; and, indeed, it requires no mighty effort of the imagination to fill the huge bowl with blue depths of crystal water, to people it with numberless tribes of fish, to clothe its banks with a luscious vegetation, dropping here and there along them a peaceful village embowered in palms, and to dot the surface of the inland sea with the brown sails of the Indian canoe. It pleases the mind, this quiet evening-tide, to dream of such things, and to wander into the dim, dim past to dwell among that

noble race of savages, first possessors of the land, whose gentle habits still live in tradition. Alas! the aborigine was effectually exterminated by the discovering Spaniard. Our vision of the lake vanishes, and in its stead is the Vale of St. Thomas, lying dark in the shadow of the hills.

The entry to the Vale from the south is by a pass known by the scarcely euphonious name of the Bog Walk. Here the encircling hills have been cleft from crown to base, forming a gorge of surpassing beauty. The road winds along the foot of the hills, and below, the Rio Cobre, between banks fringed with deadly dumb-cane and a hundred other plants of succulent and vigorous growth, now rushes noisily over a stony bed, raising a musical babblement, now swirls over a deep and silent pool, and now plunges with a mighty show of power over a rocky shelf.

As the road enters the plain it divides: one branch, skirting the eastern heights, leads to the country beyond; the western branch, the Great North Road, brings the traveller past the wide, spreading fields of a sugar estate, now brightly verdant with the young shoots of cane, past an old church whose peal of bells once had local note, through the busy township of Linstead, centre of trade for these parts, and finally to the base of a precipitous height. Up the face of the mountain, winding in and out of its deep wrinkles, creeps the white road, rising steadily for two miles to its highest point, then, after a short level stretch, plunging downwards again to the beautiful parish of St. Ann. At the highest point of the main road a bridle path strikes off to the left and brings the traveller, after a stiff climb of another two miles, to the summit of the Mount Diablo, from which the reader is supposed to survey the scene.

The orange and red have faded from the west; there the sky has assumed a grey and sober hue. It is the advent of the sweet tropic night, with its strange glories of sight and sound. The forest-clad hills loom dark against the brighter heavens beyond, and down in the valleys, where shadows are blackest, golden lights are beginning to flash. If the day with its dazzling splendours has departed, night is here, accompanied by her softer, more entrancing beauties. First and foremost are the fireflies, not as the glow-worm, their lowly congener of northern climes, content to show a humble light from the shelter of a moist bank; but, as if conscious of the pre-eminence of their graces and of their

right to be called Queens of the Night, Luna being absent, filling the air in thousands. Some pass in a great blaze of golden splendour from the two beacons on their heads; others, of a feebler flight, more chary of their favours, at one moment display their lustre, and at the next, modestly hide it.

A bat flies over the edge of the shingled roof. We see it for an instant sharply outlined against the sky, still retaining a glow from the departed sun, before it darts with a shrill cry into the blackness of the night. As it disappears, a croak, long-drawn and harsh, re-echoes through the silent forest. The call is answered by a note hoarser, if anything, and more grating to the ear than the first, and a hundred, nay, a thousand throats take up the chorus. It is the nightly concert of the tree-frogs—gray, loathsome creatures, hideous as their voices, which now fill the air with lugubrious sound. Mingled with the bass of the frogs is the cheerful chirp of innumerable crickets, and the sharp "keck-keck" of the agile wood-geckoes. The general result is certainly one of the strangest incidents of the night in these mountain solitudes. At an instant the babel ceases, and the relieved listener is beginning to congratulate himself, when suddenly, as if on a pre-arranged signal, the race of frogs raises its concerted voice in a perfect volume of croaks. The effect upon the ear of this unexpected recommencement of the concert is curious and not pleasant. The charm of the night has departed; it is time to go indoors.

The folding windows of one's bedroom are thrown open at an early hour, and the pure air of the morning, from which the sun has not yet driven the refreshing coolness of the night, is eagerly drawn in by grateful lungs. The great arch of the heavens is free of clouds, and blue, except on the horizon, where hangs a slight mist born of the night. From the valley to the right comes the protracted "coo-ee-oo" of the boy driving up the cows to milk, and a chorus of anxious bellows from the paddock beneath gives evidence that the hungry calves have also caught the well-known sound. Beneath the window is the honeysuckle, and around its blossoms, where last night the hawk-moths flitted, half-a-dozen brilliant humming-birds are darting. There are some adorned in green, gold, black and white, and with two of the tail-feathers prolonged to five times the length of their bodies, and some there

are which seem to be clad in dingy brown, but, as the sun's rays are reflected from their plumage, lo, the suit of brown has vanished, and in its stead one of gorgeous metallic bronze. Supported before the flowers by their tiny wings, humming harmoniously, they plunge their slender bills between the petals with quick movements, characteristic of the tribe. Quarrelsome, too, are the little fellows, and many a sharp engagement takes place between those constantly arriving and those who think they have a prior claim over the sweet-scented blossoms. A very short time suffices for each bird to make a round of the attractive shrub, and it disappears, in a flash of colours, over the fence, its place to be taken by some new arrival. Thus the honeysuckle is the centre of much life, and—such is the love one feels for these gems of the bird-world—one cannot help thinking that they were created as some sort of compensation for the existence of snakes and other drawbacks of the tropics.

In a tree below the house some yellow finches are noisily feeding—they strike one note in the general harmony—while on the moist path at the foot of the hill, a scarlet-legged thrush has found a worm, and proclaims the fact in a fussy manner peculiarly his own. If you were near you might see him—a smallish bird in sad-coloured plumage, relieved by a patch of rusty red under throat and tail—perched on the very summit of a dead tree, whence, his meal finished, he uplifts his morning chant of praise. At this time of the year his song consists of but two notes; but in the nesting season he pours forth a volume of rich melody, surprising to unaccustomed ears.

The eye, roaming over the pleasing panorama of sunlit forest and shady vale, is perforce made to halt when there comes within its range of vision the Vale of St. Thomas. During the night, while all slept, except the frogs, some enchanter, working a mighty spell, has swept away every vestige of that plain which last evening was seen below in its oval setting of hill and mountain. Sugar estate, white-walled village, sparkling river, have all disappeared, and in their stead a sea of some snow-white substance, seemingly, with the blue hills, a field of ivory beset with turquoise. There is no movement in the white mass, though, as the rays of the sun fall upon its bosom, a sparkling radiance it emits deepens the

resemblance, save as to colour, it bears to the sea.

Stretching from end to end, from side to side of the great hollow, filling every gorge and wrinkle of the encircling hills, as does the ocean the inlets of the land, it lies so still that a peculiar feeling of its solidarity takes possession of the mind; one almost imagines it as enduring as the hoary hills which embrace it. The inhabitant, baked by many a day of untempered heat, allows his eye to dwell lovingly upon the unsullied surface; it gives to the spirit a sense of coolness only to be appreciated by the dweller within the tropics. The white plain is a sight which impresses itself deeply in the mind, and it is easy, thousands of miles away, to conjure up every feature of the delightful scene.

The conformation of the country must be thanked for the vision. The vapours which are given off during the night from the surface of the vale are condensed on the cool sides of the surrounding hills and hang as a thick coverlet of fog over the land-locked plain. The fog in the vale bears an accredited value as a weather-sign; its presence tells us that the day will be fine; its absence, that rain is in the near future. Gradually wasting away under the powerful sun, the dissolution of the condensed vapour is effected by ten o'clock; only in some sheltered gorge does there linger till midday a trace of the white beauty.

To drive across the plain before the cloud has lifted is a curious experience. The air is filled with a haze so thin and insubstantial that it is hardly credible the beams of the sun are powerless to pierce through to the earth. Yet, as the carriage whirls down the face of the steep Mount Diablo and enters the fog, the sun is suddenly eclipsed, and the traveller finds himself in a world of twilight, peopled with indistinct forms and moving shadows, which seem to chase him as he rolls rapidly along the white road. A remarkable silence prevails. Few sounds are heard except the ring of the horses' shoes as they strike the hard earth, or the "crunch" of the wheels passing over the newly mended road. The birds preserve a silence the very opposite of the noisy chatter of their fellows on the mountains around, where the sunlight is bright and inspiring. Now and again there comes out of the fog the muffled bellow of a cow; but there are few, if any, signs that the human population is yet awake. Sometimes, in-

deed, while passing through a silent village a shadowy glimpse may be caught of an inhabitant; but the negro loves not the fog, it chills him to the bones, and he moves silently about. The traveller himself is disinclined to speak; miles are traversed without a word being spoken, until the plain is crossed and he catches the gleam of the sunbeams on the hill-tops in the gorge beyond.

The cows have all been milked, and a long line of negroes—men, women, and children—is winding slowly up the bridle-path, making the woods re-echo with their shouts and laughter. Soon they will be scattered through the pimento-groves, gathering the spice for the markets of that England they know as "Buckra-country."

The sun is high and already hot; the tropic day has fairly begun.

A WOMAN OF THIRTY.

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS. CHAPTER III.

THE drawing-room at Madingley was in no wise expensively furnished; but it always gave strangers a pleasant impression of warmth, and cosiness, and daintiness. Its large bay window looked towards the west, so that it caught the last rays of the setting sun. There were two or three cages of bright-coloured birds about, and there were always plenty of flowers. Sylvia had managed to make everything look sunshiny and home-like.

On this especial afternoon she had never been more particular about the appearance of the room in question. The Lennoxes only kept a maid-of-all-work, so that Sylvia's deft fingers were in daily requisition over the more delicate tasks of the household; but there was a page-boy, resplendent in rows of silver buttons, to open the door to any afternoon visitors. To this latter Sylvia was giving her final instructions, while she dusted the mantel-piece and arranged the flowers.

"When Mr. Dyeon comes, Arthur, you are to say that Colonel Lennox is not at home, but that he is expected back every minute."

"Yes, miss."

"But that Miss Lennox is in, and will be pleased to see him."

"Is the trap baited too openly?" she thought to herself, with a little smile, as she carefully put away a particularly frivolous novel, and replaced it by a book of more sober character. "Oh no, I think

not. The Rev. Peter must be forced a little now."

For in the last few weeks, although Sylvia had worked her hardest, and he had shown himself duly appreciative and agreeable, he had manifested no symptoms of asking her to be Mrs. Dyson. Had she only known it, it might have comforted her to learn that his inclinations were tending very much that way. The quiet, little, grey-clad figure, the rarely piquant face, had come to be a part of his daily life that he felt he could no longer do without. The big empty Rectory felt lonely. It seemed to him that he had never met a woman who was so fit to be his helpmeet as Sylvia Lennox. She was so delicately sympathetic, so frankly appreciative. She was such a good daughter and housekeeper—the Colonel, duly coached by Sylvia, had dinned the latter fact into the Rev. Peter's ears every time he met him—that he felt he could not do better than ask her to be his wife. He placed her beauty last in his catalogue of her perfections; but, in reality, it was a more potent motive than any other. Had she been plain and thirty instead of pretty and thirty, it is to be feared that he would not have given a second thought to any of her more solid merits.

But Sylvia had every intention of bringing matters to a crisis. "Mrs. Leslie and Jim" had arrived at the Bretts, and she and her father had been bidden to a dinner-party to meet them the very next night.

When Miss Lennox, therefore, once more met her quondam lover, she had every intention of figuring as the future bride of the Rev. Peter Dyson.

For by mutual arrangement, in order not to disturb the solemn business of this afternoon, Colonel Lennox was to telegraph to Sylvia that unavoidable business detained him in town until six o'clock.

Mr. Dyson had been asked to spend the afternoon and evening there, and had accepted the invitation with unwonted alacrity, more especially as his own particular friends, the Hazelfords, had been asked to grace the latter festivity with their presence.

Sylvia now subsided into a chair, and drew a large work-basket towards her—one of those real useful, matter-of-fact affairs which are the delight of busy housewives.

Just then the door-bell rang, and in a few minutes the well-tutored Arthur

solemnly ushered the Rev. Mr. Dyson into Sylvia's bower.

With a pretty little cry of confusion, and the sweetest, faintest blush, Sylvia hastily crammed all her work into the huge receptacle, and came forward to meet him.

"Pray forgive me," she said; "I did not expect you quite so soon, and you have caught me at my work, which is of too useful a kind to be legitimately permitted in a drawing-room."

"Whenever I catch you, it is always in the act of doing good to some one," said the gaunt Rector, with his most benign smile. "You are the ministering angel of our parish, Miss Lennox. Indeed, I often think you confer far more real benefits upon the people than I do. We could never get on without you."

Sylvia cast down her eyes and blushed again.

"Dear Mr. Dyson, it is very good of you to speak so kindly of my poor little efforts. It has always been the one wish of my life to alleviate as much suffering as I can."

She wheeled forward a cosy arm-chair as she spoke, and motioned the Rector towards it. He had chosen the only straight high-backed one in the room, possibly as a means of mortifying the flesh; possibly also Sylvia's proffered arm-chair was one of her methods of the alleviation of suffering. They were playing a little comedy, these two—one consciously, and the other in the supremest innocence.

"Please sit there," said Sylvia gently. "The other chair is so dreadfully uncomfortable, and you look so tired. I will stir the fire, for I am sure you have been on some long, cold tramp or other, and want to get warm."

The Rector had come straight from his own comfortable fireside, and Sylvia knew it. But it gave her a pretty air of domesticated solicitude to kneel on the hearthrug and let the ruddy firelight flicker on her bronze hair and graceful figure.

"And now I will ring for tea," she continued, rising, "for I am sure papa will be in soon. I hope you don't think him dreadfully rude for not being here to receive you, but he was called away at lunch-time on really important business. He promised to be back at half-past four," she continued, glancing at the clock, which pointed to a quarter-past; "but he will be vexed that you should find him out."

"He has left such a fair hostess in his

place that I can find it in my heart not to regret his absence," said the Rector, with a clumsy attempt at gallantry.

But it was not Sylvia's intention that he should propose until she had partaken of tea in comfort; so she rang the bell rather sharply, and only smiled absently at his last speech.

Tea was brought, and placed cosily on the low table by the fire, between Mr. Dyson and Sylvia. Such a dainty tea, with its rich old china and gleaming silver; with its appetising hot cakes and tempting bread and butter. The Rector began to feel in a hazy sort of way that his idea of Paradise was a prolonged afternoon tea with Sylvia Lennox. He did not put it in that way in his thoughts, and possibly would have been very much shocked at the profanity of the idea, but it was there all the same. When he had received his second cup of creamy tea from Sylvia's fair hands (and never before had tea been so completely to his taste), he was sufficiently in love to feel considerable annoyance when a loud ring at the bell announced the arrival of another visitor.

"That is papa," said Sylvia brightly.

The Rector's countenance fell, and only brightened again when the door opened and showed the small figure of Arthur, who bore a salver in his hand upon which lay a telegram.

Sylvia tore it open and read it.

"There is no answer, Arthur," she said. "Is it not provoking, Mr. Dyson? My father is detained on unavoidable business until six o'clock."

"It is not of the least consequence," said the Rector, openly happy once more. "We are having such a cosy time that it would be almost a pity to disturb it, would it not?"

After that they sat and talked gently on, Sylvia directing the conversation without any apparent effort into any channel she chose.

The twilight was closing in. Nothing could have looked cosier and more lover-like than the two sitting there together in the magic firelight, talking softly to each other. No element of romance was wanting. It was the time and place for an undisturbed proposal. It would all have been a very pretty scene but for the presence of the Rev. Peter Dyson. Juliet was beautiful enough; but, alas! oh, alas! for her elderly Romeo. But her elderly Romeo did not look upon affairs in this light at all. He did not feel elderly

and he did not feel ugly. He felt that he was about to stoop to conquer.

Meanwhile, Sylvia had taken down a peacock-feather fan from the wall near her and had begun to leisurely waft it to and fro. This had a charming effect on her delicate features—now allowing the firelight to play upon them, now flinging them into deep shadow. Sylvia had tried the fan trick before and knew its worth.

She began to speak again.

"Papa is already beginning alterations in the house, Mr. Dyson. He is going to build a bow-window to the morning-room, you know."

"It will be a sad change for you," said the Rector sympathetically.

He did not mean his remark to refer to the building of the bow-window, but to the bringing home of a young bride to Madingley.

"Yes. No one knows how I feel it," said Sylvia, with a little break in her voice and a turn of her wrist that flung her face into shadow once more. "It brings back to me memories of my own dear mother."

"I am sure it will," murmured the Rector vaguely.

"But I try not to let papa see that I mind," continued Sylvia, waving the fan aside again and letting him see the chastened smile that was playing round her mouth. "Anything that makes him happy pleases me."

"I think it is most heartless," said the Rector heatedly. "In any case, I highly disapprove of second marriages."

"Oh, you must not judge him so harshly, Mr. Dyson. I have always tried to do my best, but a daughter does not always satisfy a man's requirements. And my father especially requires the most tender affection."

What an angel this girl was! What a pearl of price!

"Dear Miss Lennox," the Rector said, "your submission is absolutely pathetic. It is a most trying situation for you."

"If you only knew how—how lonely—and—and unhappy I feel sometimes," said Sylvia, with more breaks in her voice, and more skilful management of the fan. "You see I am no longer a very young girl, Mr. Dyson, and I suppose I—I feel it more. I am so foolishly fond of him."

"My dear Miss Lennox—my dear Sylvia, I cannot bear this! If anything I can do—anything I can offer you will make your life happier, it is at your feet. My home is your home. As my wife you

will be free from these troubles for ever. Dear Sylvia, will you not come to me?"

He was round the tea-table by now, and kneeling by her side, feverishly pressing her hand in his. It was unfortunate that this position rather enhanced the plainness of his appearance than otherwise. A moment of repugnant feeling swept like a wave over Sylvia's soul. She felt she could not marry him.

"Dear Mr. Dyson," she said gently, "it is very good, very chivalrous of you, but indeed I am not a fit wife for you. You want a stronger, cleverer character than mine to help you in your good works."

"You are the only woman in the world for me," cried the Rector, pronouncing this time-honoured phrase with the air of saying something both tender and original. "For you to work side by side with me in the pariah is the dream of my life. Hand in hand we will walk together, Sylvia. All our thoughts and sympathies are alike and will bind us the more closely to each other."

Poor deluded Rector! And wicked little Sylvia!

"It would be indeed an ideal life, Mr. Dyson," she said softly, "and to win your love is a feat of which any woman may be proud. But I dare not decide so solemn a question so hurriedly. I must have time."

For though the supreme moment had come, and the desired prize was in her hand, she hesitated. She could not make up her mind to the step all at once. Her courage failed.

"You shall have time," said the Rector, rising stiffly from his knees; "but remember you will be keeping me in torture, Sylvia. I may not be very eloquent, dear, but I love you for all that."

"My only fear is that I am not good enough for you," said Sylvia modestly. She had recovered sufficient self-control to manipulate the fan with great effect again. "You who are so clever and great to care about me! It is all too wonderful to understand."

It had been the Rector's fear, too, previously, that Sylvia was hardly worthy of such great good fortune as to become his wife, but he was too deeply in love now to think of his former caution.

"To win you—to work with you," he repeated, "is the richest blessing I ever hope to gain. When will you let me know if it is to be mine?"

"You must give me three days' time," said Sylvia, dimpling with that smile of hers which no mortal man had ever yet been able to resist. "I shall have to think about it very seriously, you know."

With an access of fervour he stooped and kissed her hand.

"My dear," he said, "as my wife you shall never know a care. As for the three days, they will be three centuries to me."

But here Rachel Desmond came in and put an end to a conversation which was repeated to its smallest detail for her edification afterwards.

"It was just in the nick of time," as Sylvia said.

CHAPTER IV.

SYLVIA LENNOX might wear Quaker grey and smooth down her curly bronze hair to suit the tastes of her present lover, but she had no mind to go thus attired to meet her former one. No; the plainest gown her wardrobe held was for the edification of the Rev. Peter, and the richest silk she could boast of for the eyes of Jim Leslie.

She sat down before her looking-glass for fully five minutes after her toilette was completed, steadily regarding herself, although she knew that the cab was already at the door and that Colonel Lennox was fuming in the hall.

The verdict which she passed upon her personal appearance was a distinctly favourable one, for she rose with a smile upon her face. She had studied every feature with the deepest interest.

She had purposely delayed the carriage, and they were the last to enter the Bretts' drawing-room that night. Consequently, their entrance created more interest than it would have done had they arrived ten minutes earlier. Man is but an animal after all, and if feeding time is delayed he is apt to become both ferocious and sulky. No one had arrived at this pitch luckily; but there was an air of relief on every face present.

When the first greetings were over, Sylvia was at once introduced to Mr. Leslie, who had been fixed upon to take her in to dinner. She bowed smilingly, utterly ignoring that he seemed a good deal flurried, and walked across the hall with cheerful calmness, her little hand lying so lightly on his arm that he could not feel its touch.

"I wish Rachel had been here," was

her thought. "She really ought to admire my behaviour to-night. I am as cool as possible, and poor Jim is at his wits' end."

She was sitting opposite Mrs. Leslie presently, noting with a feminine exactness every detail of her costume, every feature of her face. And she acknowledged to herself that she was very handsome.

"Are you staying long here?" Sylvia asked, as her companion showed no signs of conversation.

"A little. I mean—no, not very long. About a fortnight, I think," he answered incoherently.

"It is a pretty neighbourhood, is it not?" persevered Sylvia, who was anxious that he should meet her gaze, which he had hitherto avoided; "so quiet and yet so picturesque."

"I dare say it is," said her companion shortly.

What terrible combination of unfortunate circumstances had led to his meeting Sylvia Lennox again?

"You used to be fond of the country," said Sylvia, lowering her voice to a minor key, with just a faint touch of mournful reminiscence in her tones.

"I used to be fond of a great many things for which I have lost the taste now."

"Quite so. It is wonderful how we change as we grow older."

"Yes."

The rest of the dinner passed almost in silence. It is impossible to continue a private conversation at a dinner-party. There is always sure to come a lull at the wrong moment. Sylvia postponed further effort, therefore, till afterwards; but she managed to say under cover of the talk:

"I thought it would perhaps be better for me to act as though we had not met before. Papa agreed with me there."

"It is very considerate of Colonel Lennox; but I see no reason for concealing the fact."

"No? Then you have no objection to Mrs. Leslie's knowing?"

"Not the slightest. It is a matter of the purest indifference to me, Miss Lennox. We were friends once, and I trust may be friends again. There is no reason for any secret about it."

"That is so sensible of you," said Sylvia, dimpling with the smile which had brought the Rev. Peter down on his stiffened knees at her feet, but inwardly raging with anger at his now unmoved demeanour. "Some men are so foolish in that way, and——"

But here the signal for withdrawal was given, and she had not time to finish her sentence.

"Dear Mrs. Brett," she said, as soon as she was seated by that lady's side with a large photograph album open on her lap, "do introduce me to that lovely Mrs. Leslie; I am dying to know her."

"She is very handsome, isn't she?" said Mrs. Brett, with gratified pride at this praise of her guest. "Come with me, and you shall have a chance of talking to her. She is a most charming woman."

The introduction was duly performed, and Sylvia found herself actually in conversation with the beautiful Mrs. Leslie.

"I have been so longing to know you," she began, in those sweet tones of hers that always won everybody's heart. "I used to know your husband very well years ago, and I have always wanted to see his wife."

Mrs. Leslie laughed.

"The amount of pretty girls who were acquainted with my husband," she said in a voice that instantly betrayed her origin to be American, "well, their name is legion. It's a good thing I am not inclined to be jealous, I often tell him."

She might be beautiful—she undoubtedly was—but, oh, what a style, and oh, what a voice!

"She must have had money," Sylvia decided instantly. "Jim would never have married such a voice as that without some strong inducement. He always admired mine so much, dear boy."

But she did not let this inward criticism on her companion affect her outward bearing. She chatted amiably with her until the men appeared, and then she withdrew a little, and left the field open for the pretty American.

After a moment's hesitation, Jim Leslie crossed the room and sat down by Sylvia's side.

"I am afraid you must have thought me rather rude at dinner, Miss Lennox. To tell you the truth, the surprise of meeting you was so great that I entirely forgot my manners."

"Oh, you are quite too hard upon yourself," said Sylvia sweetly, gently waving her big plummy fan to and fro as a kind of temporary shelter between herself and the rest of the room. "I saw you were a little put out." There was silence for a minute, and then she went on: "I took you at your word, Mr. Leslie, and have just been telling your charming wife that we have met before."

Jim Leslie's eyes wandered round the room in rather a bewildered manner till they rested upon the richly attired figure of the beautiful American, who was standing in the middle of the room, laughing and talking rather loudly.

"My wife!" he said, in a surprised tone.

"Yes, your wife. And allow me to congratulate you upon her beauty."

"I suppose you have made some mistake," said Jim Leslie coldly. "That is not my wife, but my sister-in-law."

Sylvia sat a little more upright in her chair.

"Really!" she exclaimed; "I beg your pardon. I see I have indeed made a foolish mistake. Your wife is not with you, perhaps?"

"I am not married," he answered, looking her full in the eyes.

For a moment Sylvia's rare self-control deserted her, and she coloured deeply. Then rallying all her forces, she laughed lightly.

"It is quite a comedy of errors, is it not? I quite understood from George Brett that you were."

"A very natural mistake," he answered coolly. "I think it is my turn to catechise now, Miss Lennox. Is it true, as report says, that you are engaged?"

A vision of the gaunt, sandy-haired Peter Dyson came before Sylvia's eyes, and she would fain have answered no. But a tone of mockery in Jim's voice roused her pride, and she answered defiantly:

"Yes."

"Then you must allow me to offer you my warmest wishes for your future life. I have not yet seen the gentleman who is to be your husband, but he ought to be a very happy man."

Sylvia instantly decided that Jim should never, never meet the Rev. Peter Dyson if she could help it.

"Thank you," she said, rather faintly. "It is good of you not to—not to—bear me malice."

"Why should I? A woman has the right to choose her own husband, I suppose. You were a little difficult to please, Miss Lennox, but let us hope that the fifth candidate for your affections will not meet with the disappointments of his predecessors."

"That is brutal," said Sylvia, shutting up her fan and moving away.

She did not speak to him all the rest of the evening.

When they were driving home together, her father said fretfully:

"You and Leslie made yourselves very conspicuous, Sylvia, sitting alone in a corner, and talking in that absorbed sort of way; it's deuced bad taste."

"Mrs. Grundy and I have long parted company, papa. You first taught me I could do without her."

"Well, well," said her father, shifting rather uneasily in the darkness, "all I can say is I am thankful that Dyson wasn't there."

"His presence would not have made the slightest difference to me," said Sylvia scornfully.

"More fool you then. Dyson's not a young man, and won't stand any nonsense. You've always made a nice mess of all your affairs before, Sylvia; but you are old enough now to take things a little more sensibly. Dyson's a man of money. Don't throw away your chances for the sake of flirting with Jim Leslie again—for I hear that woman wasn't his wife after all. He's as poor as a rat now."

"Poor?"

"Yes; lost nearly every cent, I believe. Serve him right, too, for speculating badly."

They were silent after this, and instead of stopping up, as she generally did, to make her father a cup of tea on reaching home, she brushed past him, and went upstairs to her own room without even saying good night.

"I wonder what she's got in her head now," said the Colonel disgustedly, as he watched his daughter's retreating figure. "I believe she'll be left on my hands after all."

In the meantime, Sylvia had locked herself in, and was engaged in dangerously romantic reflection.

Jim was unmarried still, but Jim was poor. She hated poverty certainly, but, as she had told Rachel Desmond, she was very fond of Jim. The question was, if she made up her mind to return a polite answer of refusal to Mr. Dyson's offer of marriage, whether Jim would propose to her again or not? Of this she was doubtful—painfully doubtful.

"Rachel said I had no heart," she said to herself, with a little smile, as she once more looked anxiously at her fair reflection in the glass; "but oh, Rachel—Rachel! if only you could feel how it is beating now!"

After a night's rest she determined to let matters take their course. If Jim were

madly anxious to see her again, he would take advantage of the Colonel's lukewarm invitation to Madingley in order to do so. If he made no sign, the letter of acceptance to the Rev. Peter should go.

The three days passed. Sylvia's heart beat every time the bell rang with a feverish hope that Jim had come to break all barriers down, and tell her that he loved her still. But he did not come, and on the third day, late in the afternoon, she sallied forth to post the letter that was to seal her fate.

Her way to the post office led down a narrow and somewhat lonely road. At a turn in it, she suddenly came face to face with Jim Leslie, the discarded favourite of love and fortune.

"How do you do?" she said rather confusedly, holding out her hand.

But he took no notice of it, and raising her eyes to his face, she saw that he looked very angry.

"Sylvia," he began, "I was just on my way to see you. I have perhaps no right at all to say what I am going to say; but I can't help it. I have just seen the man who is to be your husband. Sylvia, how can you marry him?"

"Don't you like him?" said Sylvia demurely. "His appearance may not be prepossessing, but he is very, very good."

"He is not; he is a canting hypocrite. I can't help it, Sylvia, if I do offend you. When I saw you the other night—prettier and sweeter than ever—I could not bear to think of what you were going to do. I know your father is marrying again, and that Mr. Dyson is rich. Sylvia, you are selling yourself!"

"You have no right to talk like that," said Sylvia, with her eyes on the letter in her hand.

"I know I haven't, worse luck. I wish I had, my darling. Why, when I think of you with your youth——"

"Aged thirty," supplemented Sylvia, with thoughtful precision.

"And beauty——"

"Not a patch on the divine Mrs. Leslie," murmured Sylvia dreamily.

"Throwing yourself away on that—that——"

"Canting, dogmatical prig," suggested Sylvia.

"It is fairly incomprehensible," said Jim, glaring at her. "But women will do anything for money or diamonds."

"My dear Jim, you are excited. Listen to me."

"Talk away then."

"I told you a fib the other night. I am not engaged at all."

"What? Why it is all over the parish!"

"Well, it can't be helped. See here!" She held up the letter that he might see the address. "That is accepting the Rev. Peter Dyson's proposal of marriage. Look!" She tore it in small pieces, and scattered it to the winds. "When I heard you were coming down with your wife, Jim, I determined that I would get engaged so that you might not imagine I had been waiting for you all these years. And papa was marrying again, and home was unbearable. So in a fit of pique I played with Peter's heart." She smiled a queer little smile as she said this.

"But——"

"And," continued Sylvia, holding up her hand so that he should not interrupt her, "when I did see you, I thought you didn't care. So I gave you three days to come and see me, and then I came out to do the deed. I haven't done it, you see, and although Mr. Dyson is so rich and you are so poor, and I am so mercenary—well, it is Leap Year, Jim dear, and if you are willing, why, so am I!"

THE THIRTEENTH BRYDAIN.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "*Catherine Maidment's Burden*," "*Benefit of Clergy*," "*Mr. Wingroove's Ways*," "*The Vicar's Aunt*," "*Dick's Wife*," etc.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"THAT young man of yours has come back looking rather worse than when he went away. He came to me yesterday for his lesson, and I nearly refused to give him one. He looks like a walking spectre!"

"I've only been able to see him for about ten minutes—the day he came back, Saturday; but I didn't think much of him, certainly. I'm at this moment on my way to look him up."

It was Tredennis who spoke. He had been walking up Waterloo Place, and as he waited for a moment to cross Piccadilly, his arm was touched by a man who was also waiting; and he had turned and seen Mr. Lennard beside him, who, without any prelude, had thus suddenly begun to speak of Brydain.

"I hope you're going to shake him up as well," was his answer to Tredennis's

words. And then there came a lull in the traffic and the two men crossed over together. Mr. Lennard, apparently, intended to go along Piccadilly, for he turned in that direction with a nod; then suddenly, as if struck by a sudden impulse, he turned back and caught up Tredennis again by a quick step or two. "As far as Air Street with you, if you've no objection," he said laconically. "Mr. Tredennis," he went on without a break, "what in the world is wrong with Brydain? Can nothing be done to improve his looks and—his feelings?"

"I don't see what more one can do," Tredennis answered. "I packed him off to Scotland."

"And he has brought back nothing but the blues apparently. Look here," he added, "I have meant to say this to you for some time, and I have had no chance. Brydain must take care of himself. It's a matter of necessity. He has now before him as good a future as any man ever need wish for—far better than I had at his years—and he'll spoil it all, throw everything to the winds, if he goes on like this. His health and his spirits tell on each other, of course, and they both affect his voice. He'll ruin it, simply, if he doesn't pull himself up sharp."

"I quite believe you," said Tredennis gloomily. "But——"

Mr. Lennard interrupted him. "It's taking a liberty," he began; "I'm quite aware of that, to ask you to discuss another man's private affairs, when that man is your friend. But is the boy hard up, do you know? Because if it's anything of that sort that's upsetting him, well—he's only got to come to me; or you and I could arrange it, perhaps. I can't have the best voice I ever knew spoiled by insignificant trifles like that!"

Tredennis turned quickly to him.

"You are very good," he said cordially, "very good. But I think there is nothing of that kind. He has a fair income, and if he had any sort of embarrassments I should know it."

"Then I suppose it's a woman?" said Mr. Lennard abruptly.

"More or less, I believe," Tredennis answered.

"Hang women, then! There never was a woman yet who didn't ruin everything she touched!"

Tredennis laughed slightly.

"There's a good deal of truth in your point of view," he said.

"I suppose there's nothing for it, in this case? Nothing to be done?"

"Nothing, as far as I know," Tredennis answered. "He'll come through, after a time."

"Well, do make him take care of himself! It's a case of ruin or success. Good-bye; mark my words; and—hang women!"

The day was Tuesday, and Brydain had returned from Scotland on Saturday. Tredennis, as he had said, had only had time just to see him for ten minutes; and that ten minutes' interview had been short and hurried enough. Tredennis had met Brydain at the station, and had driven part of the way home in his cab with him, and that was all. But even in that time Brydain's manner had given Tredennis a great deal of anxiety and perplexity. Brydain had, certainly, as Mr. Lennard had said, been looking more miserable, whiter, more haggard, and more depressed than he had looked before he went away; and he had scarcely spoken at all, except to answer Tredennis's questions. Of these, Tredennis asked but few. He was almost certain from Brydain's general demeanour that he had received a refusal from Etrenne Farrant. Yet, with a hopefulness from which he could not make up his mind to part, he had, just before they separated, said briefly, "Have you heard?" To which Brydain had answered shortly, "No."

The answer had perplexed Tredennis not a little. He knew that when Brydain left London, there had been only a few days left of the time for which Etrenne Farrant had asked. Brydain had been away for a fortnight, and yet had received no answer. Tredennis could not understand it. His perplexity was increased by some knowledge which had come to him incidentally, through a chance meeting with some mutual friends—the knowledge that Etrenne Farrant and her mother had left town very suddenly, and that no one exactly knew why or where they were gone.

And now Mr. Lennard's words had increased his anxiety for Brydain. He walked doubly fast under the pressure of his feelings, and he almost ran up Brydain's staircase, when he reached it.

He entered to find Brydain at the table writing letters, that is to say, at least, writing materials were before him. He raised his head slowly as Tredennis came in.

"You, is it?" he said.

"Yes," responded the other. Then, trying for his usual manner, which had unaccountably left him at the sight of Brydain's face: "I trust you're glad to see me," old fellow!" he said.

"Yes, I'm very glad to see you," Brydain answered. "Sit down in that chair, Tredennis," he went on, suddenly wheeling round his own to face his friend.

There was a short silence between the two, which neither seemed to care to break; and then Brydain spoke, suddenly and abruptly:

"What does one do when one is knocked down?" he said.

"Stand up again," responded Tredennis promptly. "What is it, old man?" he added, with a different voice.

"Everything!" Brydain answered. And he left his chair at the table suddenly, walked to the window, and turned his back on Tredennis. There was another pause, and then he said, without turning round: "Tredennis, I told you; she never wrote!"

"She will," asserted Tredennis, with a confident tone in his voice; a tone that he made all the stronger because he did not in the least believe what he was saying. "She will, man!"

"Not now," said Brydain heavily, "not now. It's much more than a fortnight; you know it is. And, Tredennis, I was at Weymouth Street on Sunday, to dinner, and they said—they said that she and her mother went out of town last Thursday." Brydain leaned one arm against the window frame, and rested his forehead against it as he ended.

"Well, very likely her mother is ill again," suggested Tredennis, with a difficult encouragement in his tone. "Mrs. Farrant does get suddenly bad, you remember, and that would account for her not writing to you, you see."

"No," said Brydain, "it isn't that. Rachel—it was Rachel who told me, and I half thought she wanted to find out from me if I knew why they were gone—would have known if Mrs. Farrant had been ill. No, it means only one thing; that she can't—that she says no."

There was again a silence, a long silence this time. Tredennis considered what to say, and racked his brains for some further quarter from which hope might be obtained; but before any surmise to urge in support of his hopeless cause had occurred to him, Brydain spoke once more. "She might have said so in so

many words," he said. "I could have stood it better than being left to make it out for myself."

A strong exclamation was on Tredennis's lips; but he managed to restrain it.

"I must pull myself together, I suppose," Brydain said, lifting his head slowly, but not without a certain ring of resolution. "Other men have put up with it and come through, and I imagine I shall."

He let his head fall again on his arm with a heavy, long sigh, however, in spite of his brave front. For a moment, Tredennis could not find any words; then he suddenly got up, and went across the room to Brydain, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Come through!" he said; "of course you will. It's a case of pluck, and you've got plenty. Hold on, and screw on to your work!"

"Yes; I'll screw on!" answered Brydain, coming back to the table. "It's been a heavy pull lately; but I dare say it'll go better now. And there's something in having enough to do."

"Rather!" said Tredennis emphatically.

Brydain sat down again at the table, and laid his hand on his writing materials.

"I was trying to write to Brydain, to poor old Mackenzie," he said. "He's the truest old friend, and I think I was rather short to him, and rough on him generally, the last few days. They were—well, watching and watching for what doesn't come is—I can't think of them!" he ended abruptly.

"Tredennis," he went on abruptly, clenching and unclenching his right hand, as it lay extended on the table, "it's plain that Fate means to be gentle to me. I'm well out of the way of the Brydain doom now, anyway. I've had a good many unnecessarily bad half-hours, I think. It can't hurt me now. The woman I want won't have me, and I shall never want any other woman."

There was a defiant cynicism about him which showed Tredennis with what an effort his words were spoken, and how infinitely stronger his love was now than his dread, and how glad he would have been to face his fate if he could have had his love. And if Tredennis had been angry with Etrenne before, he could almost have wished her dead now. It was with some difficulty that he restrained his voice enough to say calmly:

"You've learnt it roughly enough, old man; but I'm glad you know it's futile, however you learn it."

CHAPTER XXX.

"Oh, Keith, you've got news to hear, exciting news!" Tiny, as she spoke, danced into the drawing-room at Weymouth Street, where Brydain, who had come to dinner, had established himself with a book while he waited for some one to come down. "I'm so glad I'm down first. I dressed ever so quickly, because I wanted to be the one to tell you, and then I heard your ring before I was half ready, and I was distracted! Perhaps you've seen father, though, and he has told you?"

Tiny's pretty mouth drooped in some half-pretended, half-real disappointment with her words.

Brydain laid down his book and looked up at her.

"As I've not seen any one," he said, "mayn't I hear this exciting news without any more prelude?"

It was Sunday, and nearly a fortnight since the day on which Brydain had told Tredennis that all his hopes, and with them all his fears, were ended. In the days that had gone by since then, Brydain's face, though it was still very pale, had changed. There was an older look on it. The look of a man who has endured, and struggled, and suffered had imprinted itself on his face, and, in spite of his paleness, he looked better than he had done. A look of comparative repose had taken the place of his harassed haggardness, and an expression of strength, instead of torture, shone out of the deep-set, blue eyes. Brydain had turned and faced the world and his bitter disappointment like a man, and his courage was already meeting with a certain reward.

"Well, what is it?" he repeated, as Tiny paused and stood in front of him, and seemed to be deliberating.

"No; I'll tell it to you sitting down," she said, seating herself on a little chair opposite to him, as he prepared to get up, "don't move. I'm only thinking how to make it most exciting." She moved one little foot backwards and forwards on the footstool before her and contemplated it thoughtfully. "You'd better guess, first," she said. "It's about Rachel."

"About Rachel," he repeated, and paused to think over the idea. Brydain could not think at the moment of any course of action in which his cousin was likely to have distinguished herself. "Rachel?" he said again, interrogatively.

"Yes. Rachel! Rachel! Keith, you are very stupid! Not more stupid than all men, I suppose. But if I'd said that to a woman she would have guessed in an instant!"

With these words a dim light broke on Brydain's comprehension. "It's something to do with a wedding, I suppose," he said laughing. "That is the news women always guess! But is Rachel—Rachel isn't going to be married, Tiny?"

"Rachel's engaged!" Tiny said, with an excited little toss to her footstool. "She's engaged; and I'm to be bridesmaid, of course; and it's to be soon, and she thinks of green; and one is most fashionable, and I should so like to do it all by myself."

Brydain's countenance expressed considerable bewilderment under this flood of information. He collected his faculties and extricated the main idea.

"Is she really?" he said. "I am very glad—if she is happy, that is. But I've not heard who is the fortunate man, Tiny."

"Oh, there is some more guessing for you to do! You've not done it all yet. I saved him to the end. Think of all the people you know. You do know him."

"I know him," repeated Brydain. "Do I?"

After a little thought he hazarded one or two suggestions, each of which was hailed by Tiny in turn with a laugh of delight at its futility.

"Think of the most unlikely person," she said at length.

"But I've guessed every possible man I know," argued Brydain.

"No, no, you've not! There's another—you don't know him much, but you do know him. Oh, you can't think! I wonder men ever do anything if they take so long to guess. It's Mr. Reid!"

"Mr. Reid is engaged to Rachel?" said Brydain.

He was so much surprised that the only response possible was this interrogative summing up of Tiny's statements to receive confirmation.

"Mr. Reid is engaged to Rachel! Isn't he quite the most unlikely person, now? I never really thought he cared for any one; and if I had been told he did, I should have said it was for Etienne Farrant." Tiny broke off very abruptly, and her face flushing, glanced at Brydain.

He neither moved nor spoke, and she went on rapidly, her words almost tumbling over each other in her haste.

"I never, never should have thought

of Rachel, you know. Not that I don't think she is, if anything, too good for him. But I never should have believed that he and she would have cared for each other. But it seems he does, and she did; and they're happy. And I don't think he'll be bad for a brother. I've never had a brother, you know, and it's so exciting! Are they nice? Oh, I forgot; you never had one either!"

At this moment the door opened, and Rachel herself came in. Tiny ended her flow of words suddenly, and while Brydain greeted Rachel retreated into a corner to let her crimson cheeks get cool.

The whole Kingston family had wondered long and much about Brydain's relations with Etrenne Farrant. There had been no possibility of mistake as to what Brydain had meant, and what Etrenne herself had meant, on the night of the party at which the operetta was performed.

Instead of hearing, as Tiny, and Rachel, and their mother also had confidently expected, very interesting news from Brydain within a day or two after the party, they had heard nothing whatever. Brydain had only apparently overworked himself persistently. Then had come his departure for Scotland, and then, during his absence, Etrenne Farrant's abrupt departure from town. There was only one conclusion to be drawn from Brydain's manner and looks—namely, that Etrenne had refused him, and this they naturally drew. But then, her having refused him—if she had done so—was not a sufficient reason for Etrenne's departure.

"In the very middle of the season, too; and she is gone no one knows where. It is incomprehensible!" So Tiny summed up the perplexities of her proceedings. But with that summing up conjecture and wonder alike had to end. There was no way of obtaining information. "Mr. Tredennis wouldn't tell if he did know!" said Tiny, half pathetically, one day. And it was, of course, impossible to ask Brydain. So the affair was left in a certain cloud of mystery, and the only knowledge possessed by any of Brydain's relations on the subject was an instinctive consciousness that it was more discreet to avoid the mention of Etrenne Farrant's name to Brydain.

The infringement of this unwritten understanding was the cause of Tiny's crimsoned cheeks.

"I'm fated to say the wrong thing to Keith!" she said to herself angrily. "I wonder if he minded?" and she glanced

at him across the room. It was impossible to arrive at any conclusion as to if he had noticed her words or not from his face at the moment. He appeared to be quite engrossed in Rachel.

And he was engrossed, in reality, in Rachel. He was thinking that he had never realised what a very pretty woman his cousin Rachel really was. Brydain did not know how much her happiness had to do with her beauty; he did not know either how intense was that happiness. No one knew but Rachel Kingston herself that for months she had, in her heart, cared for the man who had now asked her to marry him more than anything and everything else in the world. It is impossible to explain what could have attracted her in Mr. Reid. It is always impossible to explain the affinity in one human being that attracts it to another. But so it was, and now the realisation of the secret hopes she had vainly tried to stifle was making Rachel Kingston's dark face not only attractive and pretty, but absolutely beautiful. Before Brydain had had time to think of anything else than this, the gong sounded for dinner; and dinner had not long been ended when Mr. Reid himself appeared.

They were all in the drawing-room; Rachel was making tea, and Brydain was sitting on the sofa talking to his aunt. Tiny was perched on the wide back of the sofa, interrupting and commenting on the conversation. Mr. Reid's greetings to every one were characterised by the extreme cordiality which was natural under the circumstances; and the cordiality included Brydain, with whom he shook hands in a manner which would have done credit to an intimate acquaintanceship of many years' standing. After this was accomplished he established himself by Rachel with an air of proprietorship that made Rachel blush violently and look prettier than ever in her blushes.

It had been a discovery to Mr. Reid, which astonished himself more than any looker-on, to find that the woman he really cared for was Rachel Kingston. The discovery had originated not many weeks before, on a day when Rachel had, gently and effectually, thrown herself into the breach, and talked to him in her quiet, placid manner, after a slight rebuff from Etrenne Farrant under which he had smarted considerably. Then, for the first time, it occurred to Mr. Reid that though Rachel Kingston was not the prettiest woman of his acquaintance, she was far the nicest. He then suddenly

discovered that he had always thought her so; and he further developed the profound theory that a woman's character was of more importance than her face. From this he naturally and inconsistently went on to discover that Rachel was prettier than he had ever known her to be; and then he came to the climax. He found himself in love with her, he proposed to her, and, to his wonder—for his appreciation of Rachel had called forth all his hitherto latent modesty—he was accepted.

Brydain glanced across at the two, and suddenly he became silent, and dropped out of the lively argument which Tiny was waging with her mother and any one who would share it, about the date of a certain forthcoming party.

Brydain had not met Mr. Reid since the day of the Farrants' tea-party. And the sight of him now brought back that day very vividly.

He rose suddenly from the sofa under pretext of getting the sugar-basin for his aunt, and, when he had given her what she wanted, he did not return to it. He found for himself a chair slightly screened from observation by the corner of the piano, and he sat down silently. Etrenne Farrant's words, her looks, her very voice, came back to him so distinctly as he sat there that he could have spoken aloud to her, he felt so near to her. He saw her still to be won; he saw his own thoughts about her when he had as yet scarcely waked to any knowledge of what she was; he saw the room, the grey day, the flower she wore—everything rose up before him like a picture painted for him of his own life by another hand. This had been scarcely two months ago, and now it was all over, all ended. Etrenne Farrant was free for some other man to admire, to love, and to win.

With the realisation of that past day, and the remembrance of the bitter past which rose out of that realisation, there came to Brydain, watching Rachel and Mr. Reid in their happiness, a terrible feeling of loneliness and envy. All that same happiness might have been his, he thought bitterly; if only things had been different, if only Etrenne could have cared! But Brydain bore to Etrenne not the faintest shadow of anything in the least like resentment for her treatment of him. His love was too strong, too loyal, too faithful, to be darkened by any such shadow. She had had a perfect right to do as she had

done, he told himself always; an absolute right.

He repeated this to himself, now, as he sat virtually alone in the summer twilight, in the midst of the lively conversation that was going on around him. He repeated it, though wearily, very decidedly; and roused himself with a resolute effort, as Mrs. Kingston's voice broke in on his loneliness.

"Keith, my dear," she said cheerily, "you are nearest; will you ring for lights? And will you as a great favour, in honour of the occasion, let us have a song or two?"

Two hours later the "song or two" and the evening were alike over, and Brydain and Mr. Reid went away from Weymouth Street together. Their ways coincided for some distance, and Mr. Reid had taken instant advantage of this fact to offer his company to Brydain. That he was not wholly disinterested in his offer was shown by the first observation he made, before the two men had gone more than three steps from the Kingstons' door.

"She is charming!" he began; "don't you think so?"

Brydain responded monosyllabically; but no response at all was needed. Mr. Reid only wanted a listener for an animated monologue on Rachel. This monologue lasted until their ways parted, and ended with "Good night, my dear fellow! I only wish you the same luck as mine! When you have it you'll know what luck is!"

Brydain shook hands with the enthusiastic lover in silence, and strode off alone towards home, with a compression of his lips and—when he was out of hearing—a long sigh.

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